

## WHAT MEANEST THOU, O SLEEPER?

### NO. 469

**A SERMON**  
**DELIVERED ON SUNDAY MORNING, SEPTEMBER 14, 1862,**  
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**AT THE METROPOLITAN TABERNACLE, NEWINGTON.**

*“But Jonah was gone down into the sides of the ship; and he lay, and was fast asleep. So the shipmaster came to him, and said unto him, What meanest thou, O sleeper? arise, call upon your God, if so be that God will think upon us, that we perish not.”*  
*Jonah 1:5-6.*

OF all the men in the ship, Jonah was the person who ought most to have been awake, but nevertheless, he was not only asleep, but *fast* asleep, all the creaking of the cordage, the dashing of the waves, the howling of the winds, the straining of the timbers, and the shouting of the mariners, did not awaken him, he was fast locked in the arms of sleep. See here, in Jonah's heavy slumber, the effect of sin. No noxious drug can give such deadly sleep as sin. The body never knows so dread a sleep when under the influence of opiates, as the soul does when sin has cast it into a slumber. If men could be awake to the evils, to the danger, to the desperate punishment of sin, sin were not half as deadly as it is, but when it puts its sweet cup of nightshade to the lip, that cup soon blinds the eye, and “steeps the senses in forgetfulness,” and man knows not what or where he is.

Nor is sin the only cradle in which evil rocks the soul, the world too, casts men into slumber. I do not know that Jonah ever slept so soundly anywhere as when he had gotten into the midst of busy mariners who were going to Tarshish. Ah, it is comparatively easy for us to keep awake in the midst of God's church, 'tis easy for us to maintain our steadfastness and integrity when we meet with those who rejoice in His name, but the world is an enchanted ground, and happy is that Christian who is able to survive the deadening influence of business, the soporific influence which creeps over the minds of men whose merchandise increases, whose houses are filled with the riches of nations. What downy pillows does the world sew to all armholes! What beds of ease she spreads for those whom she entraps.

See also, the slumbering effects of the flesh. It was to spare himself a little toil, it was to avoid personal dishonor, that Jonah fled. Ah, flesh! when you are yielded to, into what follies will you not drive us, into what prostration of strength do you not hurl us? Pleasures and comforts, if sought as ends, are desperate drains upon the vigor of the spirit. When the body is indulged, then the soul lies cleaving to the dust. It is not possible for us to pamper the flesh without, at the same time starving the soul. If we sacrifice unto our own lusts, we are quite certain to get the sacrifices by robbing God's altar. The body shall not have pleasure in sin, except the soul shall soon be in a state of misery and decay.

See also, in our text, one of the devices of Satan. He seeks to lull God's prophets into slumber, for he knows that dumb dogs that are given to sleep will never do any very great injury to his cause. The wakeful watchman he always fears, for then he cannot take the city by surprise, but if he can cast God's watchman into slumber, then he is well content, and thinks it almost as well to have a Christian asleep as to have him dead, he would certainly sooner see him in hell, but next to that, he is most glad to see him rocked in the cradle of presumption, fast asleep. May we be delivered from Jonah's condition, but since like Jonah, we are infested by sin, encumbered by the flesh, surrounded by the world, and tempted by the devil, we have good cause occasionally that the shipmaster should come round and shake us by the shoulders, or even roughly strike us with a rope, lest we should sleep as do others, and so fall into spiritual decay.

I shall this morning act the shipmaster's part, and, as captain of this vessel, I will cry both to *slumbering saints* and to *sleepy sinners*, “What meanest thou, O sleeper? arise, and call upon your God.”

**I.** First of all, we will deal with the SLEEPING SAINTS—those poor Jonahs who are God's true servants, but are yet asleep.

To break their bands of sleep asunder, let me remind them, first, that *the ship is in danger*. It was ill for Jonah to sleep when all hands were at the pumps. When every other man was doing his best to lighten the ship, and save her if possible from the terrific tempest, it was a shame that he should be asleep. The peril of human life demanded of every generous spirit prompt and earnest action. Every groaning timber would upbraid the lazy, sleepy prophet. Member of this church, professed Christian, is it not a shame, think you, to be slumbering, to be dilatory in your Master's service when the souls of men are in danger? It is marvelous to me how men can be so careless about the ruin of men's souls. Let us hear the cry of, "Fire! Fire!" in the streets and our heart is all in trepidation lest some poor creature should be burned alive, but we read of hell, and of the wrath to come, and seldom do our hearts palpitate with any compassionate trembling and fear. If we are on board a vessel, and the shrill cry is heard, "A man overboard!" whoever hears of a passenger wrapping his plaid around him and lying down upon a seat to contemplate the exertions of others?

But in the church, when we hear of thousands of sinners sinking in the floods of ruin, we behold professed Christians wrapping themselves up in their own security, and calmly looking on upon the labors of others, wishing them no doubt all success, but not even lifting a finger to do any part of the work themselves. If we heard tomorrow in our streets the awful cry—more terrible than fire—the cry of, "Bread! Bread! Bread!" and saw starving women lifting up their perishing children, or hungry men imprecating curses upon those who would keep back their necessary food from them, would we not empty out our stores? Who among us would not spend our substance to let the poor ravenous creatures satisfy the pangs of hunger?

And yet, here is the world perishing for lack of knowledge. Here we have them at our doors crying for the bread of heaven, and how many there are who hoard their substance for avarice, give their time to vanity, devote their talents to self-aggrandizement, and center their thoughts only on the world or the flesh! Oh! could you once see with your eyes a soul sinking into hell, it were such a spectacle that you would work night and day, and count your life too short and your hours too few for the plucking of brands from the burning.

I suppose if we had once seen a drowning man, or a wretch borne over the rapids of Niagara, or if we had seen a person stabbed in the street, we should scarce ever forget it. Death's doings are painted in very red colors upon the memory. O that God would give some of you the sight of a lost soul! O that you could see it in its naked condition when it steps behind the curtain into the world unknown. O that you could behold its first horrors, when it discovers itself exposed to the anger of Almighty God. Would that you could see that soul when the awful hell-sweat shall stand upon its brow as God proclaims—"Depart, you cursed one!"

O that the vision of hell were sometimes before our eyes that some few of the sighs of a damned soul were ringing in our ears! Would God we had a vision of the judgment, the tremendous crowd, the flaming heavens and the rocking earth, the open book, the eyes that flash with lightning and the voice that speaks with thunder! Would that we could see the crowds as they descend into the pit that has no bottom, for then, starting up like men that have long been given to a foolish slumber, we should gird up our loins, and using both our hands we should seek to pluck men from the burning, and deliver them from going down into the pit. Men are dying! Men are perishing! Hell is filling! Satan is triumphing! Poor souls are howling in their agonies, and do you sleep? I, as the shipmaster, shake you yet again. O that the Holy Spirit may quicken and arouse you, perhaps He may do it through my voice, while again I adjure you. "What meanest thou, O sleeper? arise, and call upon your God," that the multitudes perish not!

A second time I would arouse you, by reminding you that in the halcyon times in which we live, men are earnestly craving for our prayers—*men are longing for deliverance*. In Jonah's ship every man was a pleader, every person was praying, and though I cannot say this of the world that lies in the wicked one, yet, to a very great extent, it is true that the masses are longing to hear the words of this life. There was never an age like this for hearing sermons. I marvel, every Sabbath day, as I see the crowd

willing to stand outside waiting by the hour, and then rustling in like a mountain torrent, even treading upon one another to hear the Word.

Is not this an encouragement to labor? See the theater on a Sunday, no actors could attract greater multitudes! How they throng the doors to listen to some simple-minded man, who is going to tell the story of the cross! I have seen this thirst for the Word all over England, but this present week I have seen in a village, thinly populated, some ten thousand people crowding the cliffs, drinking in every word from the preacher's lips—earnest to listen to the message of mercy. We have not now to stir up the people to attend the means, for there is all around us a desire to hear. This is a hearing age, this is a time when men are willing to listen—when they are only too glad to hear the Word faithfully preached. I say not that it is so in every place, but certainly it is in London, and a man with but very moderate gifts, if his tongue be but on fire, will soon command an audience. If there be an empty place of worship in London, it is generally the preacher's fault, and in nine cases out of ten, you will find that empty benches are evidences that the man does not preach the Gospel, for if he preached the Gospel, the people would soon throng to listen to him.

What, shall we sleep now? What, shall we be idle *now*? Ministers of Christ, shall we relax our efforts, or shall we be dull and cold about immortal souls when every omen urges us to zealous labor? My fellow workers—deacons and elders, honored church officers—will you draw back in this day of hopefulness, and refrain to sow the seed, when the field is plowed and ready for the grain? Church members—you young men that can speak in public, you women that can in your households talk of Christ—will any of you be dull and lethargic *now*? Now is the moment when we may carry the fortress by storm, and if armed and carrying bows we turn our backs in the moment of victory, when triumph trembles in the scales, how shall we throughout life regret our wicked folly and idleness. What meanest thou, O sleeper, to sleep *now*? Arise, for 'tis a happy and auspicious hour—“Arise, and call upon your God.”

Yet further, let us remember that as Jonah was the only man in the ship whose prayer could be of any avail, so *the children of God are the only men who can do any real spiritual service to the perishing world*. All the cries of the shipmaster and his crew were addressed to the gods of their various countries, who had ears which could not hear, and hands which could afford no aid. Jonah was the only man who worshipped the Lord that made the sea and the dry land, hence, his prayers alone could save the ship.

Now, the salvation of the world under God lies with the *church*. Christ has finished the atonement, it is for the church to finish the ingathering. Christ has paid the purchase-price, and completed redemption by blood, it is for the church to seek the Holy Spirit, and fully to redeem the world by power. Suppose, then, that you who fear God say, “This is no case of mine, I am not my brother's keeper,” suppose that you waste opportunities, and throw precious time to the dogs, then the world must go down to its awful doom, but mark you, its blood shall be upon your skirts.

This generation, under God, must have salvation given to it through our ministry, through our evangelists, through our Sunday schools, through our missionaries, through our preaching and teachings, and if we do it not, the world will not stay from perishing while we are staying from laboring. Men will not live on until another generation worthier than we are shall have taken our places, but this generation must go down to the tomb, muttering curses between its lips against the faithless, wicked, unbelieving, inactive church, and we must go down too, to meet the doom of those who had no real faith in Christ, or else they would have had a love for the souls of men, who had not the spirit of Jesus, or else they would with wooing entreaties, and with earnest efforts have brought men to the cross of Christ.

Ah, beloved! I know that we have some in the church who are but a drag to it. There are some in all churches who are of this kind, but let me solemnly remind you—we must address the church as a body—let me again remind the church that it is with her and with no one else that the world has to deal as to its conversion. We must never think of leaving Christ's work to societies. They have had their day, and have supplied a great lack created by the loss of the apostolic spirit, but it is now time that the aroused and revived church should assume her true position and do her own work.

Fifty years or more, missionary societies have been trying to convert the world, and albeit that many souls have been saved, and therefore the effort has been far from useless, yet, compared with apostolic

success, they have been a miserable failure. All these years we have spent ten times the money, with not a tenth of the success of early evangelistic effort. In my inmost soul, I believe that the Lord is not with the most of our foreign missions. And why? Because God never called the missionary societies to the work. He never bade the missionary society become the spouse of Christ, and bring forth sons unto Him. His offspring, His seed which shall reward Him for His soul's travail, must spring from His own well-beloved bride. Much as I value all good societies, I cannot hesitate to declare that the church is the ordained agent, and that all beside is human, and derives authority only from man. Hence, I say of a society for the conversion of the heathen, it is a man-constituted body, and not of God.

The Lord will work, not by committees, but by His churches. The church must do her own work, and when all our churches are thoroughly aroused to this fact, and every congregation shall send out its own men, pray for their own men, and support their own men, we shall see greater things than we have ever dreamed of, and "The kingdoms of this world will become the kingdoms of our Lord, and of His Christ." But it lies with the church. O you that are in the church and sleep, what mean you? Arise, and call upon your God.

Further, and here I more especially address such members of this church as may have been hitherto careless about the good work. Remember, sleeper, that *you are in the ship yourself*, that you enjoy its privileges, and therefore, you ought to take your quota of the work. It is said of Lepidus, a Roman officer, that one day, when all the soldiers were at drill, he laid down out of the sunshine, and said he wished it were all the duty of a soldier to lay under a tree forever. We have some such soldiers. The breed is not extinct. The enlisting officer, however exact he may be, cannot help it, there will be some such introduced into all our little armies, who like to lie in the shade, and take matters easy, and wish this were all that ever a Christian soldier had to do. Oh, rise, man! for if the battle is to be won, it must not be fought by soldiers lying in the shade, but by men who can bear the heat of the sun, wear their heavy armor without weariness, and rush to battle against the foe for God, and for the truth, fearless and dauntless, in the face of leaguered hosts.

There is an old story told of Philip, last king of Macedon. Before the last disastrous battle by which his monarchy was destroyed, it is said that he stood up to harangue his soldiers upon a sepulcher, and it was interpreted by the augurs to be a sign of sure defeat, because he stood upon a tomb to speak. And I, your minister, if it should ever be my unhappy lot to stand upon a dead church to preach the Word, cannot expect anything but the most disastrous defeat. Let but the minister of God be supported by a living church, let him be borne up in the arms of a loving and a praying people, and who can stand against his word? Nothing but victory must follow. But let us have dead, careless deacons and elders, let us have idle church members, and the omens are against us, and the result of our battle must be a terrible calamity. There is more than we think of mischief done by the presence of one unconverted person in a church.

We are told by anatomists, that there is no part of the body which is dead. Even the teeth and the bones are alive. Life abhors alliance with death, and if a dead substance once gets into the body, all the efforts of nature are directed to the one point where the foreign body is found, to drive it out, and often ulcers and running sores, and such like things, are but the effects of nature seeking to expel the dead substance from the body. Now, there is nothing in Christ's real church that is dead, and if ever dead substances get into the church, they will not lie there still and quiet, but the church shall be aware of it in her every nerve and pore, and she shall soon begin to exert her strength and vitality to expel the foreign substance from her living body—would that this energy could be spared for other works, for the saving of souls for Jesus.

Now, I address some pretended Christians here who are not alive to God. Let me beg of them to relinquish their profession, or if not, to make it real. Either be what you profess to be, or drop your profession. Lie not unto God, for in so doing you injure the church of which you are a part, and which, since you are a part of it, it is your duty to serve. I should not expect if I were a member of a commercial firm, to take half the profits, and to do nothing. It is mean to the very last degree to share the benefits without uniting in the toil. And yet some professors are guilty of this miserable conduct. As it was in the days of Job, so it is even until now—"The oxen were plowing, and the asses were feeding beside them,"

there is always a large proportion of the latter class in the churches, too glad to feed, but quite unwilling to work. To every Jonah, then, I say, "Either arise and pray with us or get out of the ship, for sooner or later we shall be compelled to throw you out if you do not."

Furthermore and here let me conclude this point, *the honor of our God is mightily concerned in every Jonah being aroused*. How could JEHOVAH be glorified, if the only worshipper of JEHOVAH in the vessel should sleep? If he did not cry to God, how could the mariners know whether JEHOVAH did hear prayer or not? Now, mark you, the honor of Christ—of His doctrines, of His blood, of His person, the dignity of everything that we hold sacred—rests, in the eyes of the sons of men, in the keeping of the church. When a church grows proud, worldly, and idle, what does the world say? "That's your religion!" says the world, and then, "Aha! Aha! Aha!" it says, "What a lie religion is!" But let the world see a really earnest church, it grows very angry, it finds all the fault it can, but down deep in its heart, it reverences those it hates, and it secretly confesses, "There is a power here." They gaze and admire, even though they hate the might with which God surrounds such a church as this.

The Christian religion was at one time looked up to by the heathens with awe and reverence, for they saw its martyrs dying without a tear; its poor content in their poverty, without murmuring; its great men humble, not giving way either to lust or covetousness; they saw the purity and chastity of Christian matrons, they beheld the diligent industry of Christian bishops, they saw as though they beheld the face of an angel, when they looked upon Christ's fair church on earth. But she became degenerate—she committed fornication by being allied with the State, she lost her dignity, and turned aside from her high position as queen of the Lord, and a spiritual body quickened by a spirit from above. What then did the world do? It mocked and jeered, and while it paid an outward homage to a bejeweled church glittering with gold and silver, yet in its soul it loathed and despised her. Men no longer needed to dread the omnipotence of Christian zeal.

An excellent historian thus speaks of believers in the martyr age—hear it, and judge whether men have such reasons to fear us now. He describes the common opinion of the Roman pagans concerning the followers of Jesus, "They were intensely propagandist. While ever unseen they were at work. Every member was a missionary of the sect, and lived mainly to propagate a doctrine for which they were ever ready to die. Thus the infection spread by a thousand unsuspected channels. Like a contagion propagated in the air, it could penetrate, as it seemed, anywhere, everywhere. The meek and gentle slave that tends your children, or attends you at table, may be a Christian, the favorite daughter of your house, who has endeared herself to you by a tenderness and grace peculiarly her own, and which seems to you as strange as it is captivating, turns out to be a Christian, the captain of the guards, the legislator in the senate-house, may be a Christian! In these circumstances who or what is safe? What power can defend the laws and majesty of Rome, and the peace of domestic life, against an enemy like this? Then it was often as hateful for its absence as for its presence. With sullen moroseness this strange people studiously absented themselves from all places and scenes of public entertainment and festivity. Games, shows, gladiatorial contests, public fetes of every kind, military or civil, they eschewed as they would have done the plague. Such scenes, in truth, were so mixed up with idolatry, and so steeped in licentiousness and sin, that though consecrated by the presence and express sanction of their country's gods, they were not good enough for them!" O my brethren, how I wish that we could be thus happily reviled. If we cannot reach so high, at least let us keep our garments spotless.

Would you make this church, my fellow members, to become a stink in the nostrils of the wicked? We have, brethren, a power among men. When they have followed us with their hoots and their jeers, we have borne patiently, and have been too glad to bear every slander if we might arouse a lazy generation from their lethargy. We have seen success follow our efforts. We have beheld the opening of places for the preaching of the Gospel which had been closed for centuries. We have seen the theater devoted to God on the Sabbath day—and now, now, shall we stay our course? God forbid! for, if we do, what shall the enemy say but, "Lo! God has forsaken them, the Gospel can but create a temporary excitement, truth is evanescent in its influence." Instead thereof, let us hold hard to God and to His Word, for the glory of the truth, and for the honor of our Lord Jesus Christ.

But, I hear some self-satisfied people say, “*We* do not want this sermon this morning, *we* are not asleep. The members of this church are not a slothful people.” Well, dear friends, I cheerfully admit that, as a body, we are not given to slumber, but I am not so sure that this is true of you all. At any rate, those who are awake will find it a good thing to have a jog, lest they should fall like Eutychus into a sleep, but I am sure that some of you are asleep, and I shall not hesitate to treat you as such.

But you will reply to me, “Why, sir, we *talk* about religion.” Many people talk in their sleep. I have heard of a man who preached an excellent sermon when he was asleep. “Well, but is not our *walk* consistent?” Yes, but when I was a small boy, I used to walk in my sleep, and then I could venture in my sleep where I would not have wandered when I was awake, and I should not wonder but this may be your case. “Yes, but do we not feel religious influences? Do we not *weep* under a sermon?” Yes, and I have heard people cry in their sleep. Such things are quite possible. “But do we not *rejoice* very much when we hear the Gospel?” Yes, and some folks will laugh in their sleep. John Bunyan tells of Mercy, who laughed because of the beauty of her dream, and your dreams may be so pleasant that they make you laugh.

“Ah, well,” says one, “but I do not see that we are so very sound asleep, for we *think* a great deal about religion.” Yes, and people think when they are asleep, for what are their dreams but unconnected thoughts? And so you may have some straying thoughts of God and of right, and yet after all you may be fast asleep.

“Then, what do you mean by a man’s being really awake?” I mean two or three things. I mean, first, his having a thorough consciousness of the reality of spiritual things. When I speak of a wakeful man, I mean one who does not take the soul to be a fancy, nor heaven to be a fiction, nor hell to be a tale, but who acts among the sons of men as though these were the only substances, and all other things the shadows. I want men of stern resolution, for no Christian is awake unless he steadfastly determines to serve his God, come fair, come foul. I would have you, young Christians, dedicated to God’s service. Just as Hamilcar led his two children to the altar, and made them swear by the gods that they would never cease their enmity to Rome while they lived. I want you to feel that the vows of God are upon you, so that you cannot cease from attacking sin and winning souls as long as you live.

And I do not think you are awake, moreover, unless you are moved by a passionate earnestness to win souls for Christ. A man who labors, and sees no success attending his efforts, may be awake if he mourns, and groans, and sighs before God, but an idle preacher, a preacher without converts—a Sunday school teacher in whose class there is no conversion—a man who never saw a sinner brought to Christ by his means, and yet is happy and content—such a man is asleep, let him take heed that he sleep not the sleep of death. I had sooner the Lord would send claps of thunder to this church, in the form of heavy trials and troubles—the removal of your pastor, the taking away of our best men, the riot of mobs, or the slander of the press—than that we should continue to multiply and increase, and should make this place a huge dormitory wherein we snored out God’s praises in our sleep, instead of an armory where we sharpen our swords on the Sabbath to go out the whole week long, contending for God and for the good of men. Never may these benches be beds, nor these seats couches for sluggards to recline upon. “What meanest thou, O sleeper? arise, and call upon your God.”

I have now said enough, I hope, to the slumbering Christians, only that there are some who are asleep who will not hear what I say. I do not mean that there are any in the congregation asleep with their eyes shut, but if they are asleep with their hearts, it is probable that what I say may do good to those who are awake, but those who are asleep and given to slumber, will say, “A little more rest and a little more folding of arms; we are saved ourselves, let us sleep on.” May the Lord vouch safe you a better mind, and compel you to act as holy gratitude and love demand of you.

## II. Very solemnly and earnestly would I now address myself to SLUMBERING SINNERS.

What crowds are there, this morning, of these careless ones, who are at ease on the brink of ruin. Unconverted and yet unconcerned, exposed to the wrath of God, but fearless, as though all were peace, on the edge of perdition, but merry as a marriage bell, condemned already, but mirthful as revelers at a feast.

Let me attempt to disturb your quiet, by remarking, *first*, that *your sleep is utterly incomprehensible to those who are awake*. Convinced souls, who feel the danger of their own state, cannot understand how you can be so careless. We were as foolish as you are once, but when we first began to perceive things in their true light, it was the wonder of wonders to us how we could have been so much at ease in so perilous a position. The man who sports upon the gallows, or laughs when consuming in the fire, or jests with his head upon the block, is not more a marvel than you.

You are a *sinner*—a sinner! You can hear that title applied to you without any sort of fear, whereas a sinner is a thing abhorred of God. The God that made you loathes you. The sinner is one whom God *must smite*. He bears with you long, but He *must smite* you soon. The sword may sleep in its scabbard, but it *must leap forth to smite you even to the death*. A *sinner!* Why, you are one whose life is a continued miracle, for the heavens would fall upon you, if long-suffering did not restrain them, the very stones of the field would smite you, if God did not bind them over to keep the peace, and the beasts of the field are in league against you, and would devour you if He did not hold them in from you.

Why, you are one who has no friend anywhere, you are a blot upon nature, you are a dishonor to creation, you are loathsome in yourself, you are contagious to others, you are grievous to the best of men, you are harmful even to the bad, you are a weed ripening for the burning, a pool of foul waters breeding miasma, a monster to be hunted out of the universe of God. A felon, a criminal, a traitor, a *sinner*, which is all these things in one, and yet, under such an accusation, you are at ease!

Man, remember again, you are a *mortal*. Time eats away your life and hurries you to your grave. The sun does not stand still for you, speeding on his everlasting course, day after day, bears you to the tomb. Every tick of yonder clock sounds as the footfall of approaching Death. The rider upon the pale horse is pursuing you, his charger is foaming with speed. Perhaps you may never see another day, the light of 1863 may never shine into your eyes, or, if you should not yet expire, how short is the longest life! How certain is your death!

A mortal man, and yet you sleep! Think you, man, of that upper chamber where you shall play the leading part, pale and languid, stretched out upon the bed, the curtains shall be drawn about you, and every voice shall be hushed in sad anxiety, weeping relatives shall gaze upon your brow, clammy with the death-sweat, and life shall be a thing of seconds with you. Heavily heave the lungs, languidly beats the pulse, the awful moment is at hand. It is yourself, you strong man, grappling with a stronger than you are! Those are *your eyes* which shall be glazed in the darkness of death, and those are your limbs which shall be gathered up in the last mortal agony. And do you, knowing, feeling that you must die, and having the sentence of death in your members already—do you sleep still? Alas! alas! how dire the stupor which death cannot startle.

But, man, remember you are an *immortal*, and this makes it the more grievous that you should sleep. You shall not die when you die, but you shall live again forever! Forever! Forever! Oh, eternity! Eternity! a deep without a bottom and without a shore! My hearer, you must sail over it forever and forever never reaching a port, and that eternity must be to you, if unsaved, a sea of fire, lashed to eternal storm.

Eternity, eternity, you mountain without a summit! Up its sides you must climb, O sinner, and find it an ever-burning volcano. On, on, on, must you ascend, for summit there is none—forever! forever! forever! forever! And yet do you sleep on, sinner? What madness do I see in you? It is madness without method, insanity exaggerated, to despise the warnings of eternity. Remember, man, as you are immortal, there is a *heaven*, and dying as you are living, you will lose it. For you no harps of angels, no songs of saints, no melodies of joy, for you no face of Christ to be seen with rapture, no embraces of the ever-loving husband, for you no sunshines of the Father's face, no bliss ineffable, no rivers of pleasure at His right hand. You are losing all these! Eternal and exceeding weights of glory you are spurning, and yet you sleep! O sleeper, what meanest thou?

If this bestir you not, I would have you remember, man, as surely as you lose heaven, so certainly you are gaining *hell*. For you the flames that never can be quenched, the thirst without a drop of water; for you an angry God, a fiery law, a flaming Tophet, for you the company of blaspheming fiends and despairing spirits, for you unutterable agony, “where the worm dies not, and the fire is not quenched.”

“What meanest thou, O sleeper,” when this must be your doom if you sleep on. Were it not that we know that man is dead in trespasses and sins, this sleeping would be utterly incomprehensible to those who have once been awakened. I marvel that I can preach about these awful themes without an agony of earnestness. These are no trifles, no themes for an orator’s idle hour, or a hearer’s curious ear. These matters may well make both the ears of him that hears thereof to tingle. O that they might make your hearts tremble before the Lord, that with contrition you might seek His face.

Further would I press this matter home. I am sure that *you* frivolous, thoughtless men and women, *can give no justifiable cause for carelessness*. Sinner, wherefore sleepest thou? Perhaps you tell me you do not believe there is any danger, I reply to you, you *do* believe it, you know you do. I reason not with you if you pretend to be infidels, there is that in you which makes you know that there is a God, and that He must punish sin, you may boast that you have no fears of the hereafter, but when you are alone, or sick, or in your sober senses, you tremble at the judgment to come. You *know* it man, and at the bayonet point, I charge home upon you. O that I could carry your heart as readily as your conscience. You know that these things are not fictions nor falsehoods. If you should have some honest doubts, you have but to open your eyes to see, and use your common sense to be convinced. Do but listen to the utterances of your fellow sinners, as they have passed from time into eternity, and have felt the foretaste of eternal wrath, and surely you must confess that there is a God that visits transgression and sin upon the ungodly.

But you will tell me perhaps, there is time enough, and therefore you may sleep, but there is no time, man, there is no time to spare. If I were in a fever I would not say, “There is time enough to be healed,” but I would say, “Let me be delivered from this consuming heat.” If I stood just now upon the edge of a burning mountain and felt the lava giving way beneath my feet, I would not say, “There is time enough yet,” but I would long *now* to make my escape. Sinner, you stand today over the mouth of hell upon a single plank, and that plank is rotten, you are swinging over the jaws of perdition by a solitary rope, and the strands of that rope are snapping now. *Now! Now!* you are in danger! You may die this morning. Many places of worship have been made places of death. God save you that this may not happen to you, but still this is your time of danger, and there is no time to spare.

Do you say, “Well, we may as well sleep, for *there’s no hope for us*”? No! sinner, no! Blessed be God, you cannot say that! You that sit under my ministry constantly know I never taught you that, I never said of any one of you that you could not be saved. I have not preached to you no impossible Gospel, I have not shut the gates of mercy on mankind in proclaiming Christ, have I not rather told you that “He is willing to save unto the uttermost them that come unto God by Him?” I have set the door open before you and I have entreated you to come in, nay, I have labored to compel you to come in that His house may be filled. Ever now again I utter the same message, “Whosoever will let him come and take the water of life freely.”

Trust in Jesus, trust in Jesus, and you shall be saved. Your despair is wicked, for it gives God the lie, your despondency is sinful, for it doubts the truth of Him who cannot be false to Himself or to you. Sinner, trust Him and you shall be saved this morning. God help you to throw yourself flat today upon the covenant promises of God in Christ, and trusting His precious blood He will save you now and save you forever. O wherefore, wherefore sleepest thou? If you can cite no good cause, if you can offer no cogent reason, what meanest thou then, O sleeper? arise, and call upon your God.

But soul, soul, we remind you yet again, as we cannot understand your sleep, and you cannot justify it, we would solemnly beg you to consider that *your sleep will soon end in ruin*. Ah, there are some of you whose hearts I shall never reach. Let me live as long as I may, I shall never see you saved. There are some of you—I have often made you weep, but the Lord has not made you hate your sins. Some of you love drunkenness, and though you leave it for a little season, yet all the entreaties of the minister and all the pleadings of your conscience cannot keep you from returning like a dog to his vomit, and like a sow that is washed to her wallowing in the mire.

Oh, my hearers, there are some of you—I have not quite despaired of you, but I tell you solemnly it has almost come to that. O that you would know even now in this your day the things which make for your peace. Oh, how I fear, and think I have just cause to fear, that there are some of you who will sit in this Tabernacle till you die, and you will go from this place to hell with my voice of entreaty ringing in

your ears. I have prayed for you, and you are not saved; I have leveled sermons at you, and you have not been moved; I have preached plainly to your face against your iniquity, and laid your sins before your eyes, and you have not repented; I have held up my Master's bleeding body and you have not been wooed to love. You have been convicted for a season, and you have hushed the voice of conscience; you have vowed, and you have broken your vows; you have turned again to your folly, and you are still what you were, senseless, stolid, hardened, dead in sin. I shall not forever hammer at this granite, not always shall the horses run upon the rock, nor shall we plow there with oxen, for God shall lay judgment to the line and righteousness to the plummet, and *where are you then?*

Oh! if we knew by express revelations, concerning any man here present that he would be one day in hell, if looking into his eyes we could read there, "That man will dwell forever in torments," should we not weep over him? Yet I fear me there are such here. I fear me—may God remove the fear by His grace—I fear me there are such. "Lord, is it I?" Let each one say—"Lord, is it I?"

Well, sinner, you shall go sleeping on. You will go home to your house today and forget all that I have said, you will come again tonight, but the result will be the same, like the door on its hinges you will turn in and out without a change all your days. See man, you will listen to my voice, it will be to you as a pleasing song but nothing more, you will be all your life as the deaf adder which cannot be charmed. You will now and then murmur in your sleep, "The preacher is too earnest, and makes too much noise about these melancholy matters," or "He is too prone to dwell on these hard threatenings." You will return to a deeper sleep, and so continue year by year. How do you approve of the prospect? But stay, let me finish the story.

One day there will run a rumor among us, "So-and-so who sat in that pew is dead." "Did he die in the Lord?" will be our solemn question. And the answer will be, "We fear not, he showed no signs of repentance or of faith in Christ." Ah then, what must our conclusion be. Well sinner, well, do me this one favor. If you will be damned, let me be clear of your blood. Do me but this one service—if you will perish let it not be laid to the door of my unfaithfulness. If there be anyone here present, stranger or regular attendant, who will choose his own perdition, I charge you pay some regard to my earnest protest, for I enter it now before the Lord. Be damned if you will, but do let me first of all stand before you and tell you what damnation means, and tell you that there is a way of salvation. Let me stretch out these hands again and plead with you that you would come to Christ, that you might live.

"What meanest thou, O sleeper? arise, call upon your God," for it may soon be too late for you to arise. None will be able to warn you soon, none will weep for you soon, none will entreat you soon. When once the iron gates are shut, and the brazen bolts are drawn, all the friendship of earth or the fury of hell cannot unlock them, the awful gratings of those bolts that shut in souls forever in fell despair, shall be ever in your ears, covering you with hopeless dismay. Now I pray you while yet there is hope. "Awake! arise, or be forever fallen!"

Lastly, I think I may call upon those present here, who know what it is to be fully awakened, to do their best to awaken others. We read in ancient history of the Sybarites, who were a people so given to slumber that they killed their dogs lest their barking should arouse them, and would have no crowing of the cock to awake them at morn, there are some sinners who would desire to banish every warning friend and faithful monitor far away from them. But I pray you, even though it should be unpleasant, do your best to keep your friends from ruin.

We know that when persons are likely to perish through laudanum, and they are falling to sleep, the physician does not hesitate to thrust pins into the flesh, or walk them up and down even though they cry and long to go to sleep. So with you, be not too careful about wounding the feelings or shocking the nerves if you may but win the soul. Better that you should get into discredit for being impertinent with your friends than let their souls perish through your politeness. Be you not like Agag, who comes delicately, with "surely the bitterness of death is past." Like the old Puritans, who availed themselves of every opportunity to rebuke sin and uphold righteousness, so be you instant in season and out of season. If you should save a soul through being too zealous, neither your Master nor the saved one will blame you for it, and at least in heaven it will never be a source of regret to you that you were too active and too diligent. You may have an opportunity today. Who can tell whether God may not bless you in it, if

you use it? But I pray you use it, whether He bless you or not, lest the neglect of that opportunity should leave blood upon your skirts.

By Him that bought you with His blood, live to His service—by Him that called you unto a holy calling, give yourselves wholly to the winning of souls—by Him who from the beginning has chosen you unto salvation, live as the elect of God, having bowels of compassion. By your life, for which you are responsible—by your death, which may be so near—by Jesus, whose face you hope to see—by hell, into which lost souls are sinking—by heaven, to which the penitent shall rise, which is your hope and your joy—proclaim the Word everywhere to men. Tell it, tell it till the skies shall echo it. *“He that believes and is baptized shall be saved.”* “Cast your bread upon the waters”—labor, toil, seek, strive, agonize—and God give you His own blessing, for Jesus’ sake. Amen.

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Taken from The C. H. Spurgeon Collection, Version 1.0, Ages Software. Only necessary changes have been made, such as correcting spelling errors, some punctuation usage, capitalization of deity pronouns, and minimal updating of a few archaic words. The content is unabridged. Additional Bible-based resources are available at [www.spurgeongems.org](http://www.spurgeongems.org).